# Spectrum

Summer 2022

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**Cover art adapted from "Icebreakers" by Allison Zheng**

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# a letter from the managing editor

What do abortion rights mean to you? In the wake of the overturning of Roe v. Wade, in this time when many of us are wondering which of our rights will be taken away next, it may seem easy to lose all hope, to lose the will to create. What's the point of making something beautiful when the world is burning all around you, and nothing seems to be getting any better?

For me, writing is sometimes the only way for me to make sense of the world around me--when I can't eloquently express my feelings into my thoughts, I can understand them through my writings. When I write, I am no longer a victim of unjust laws and a subject of the rich and powerful who are hell-bent on taking my rights away; I have the agency to create something beautiful out of soul-crushing darkness. After all, isn't that the point of art itself?

For those of you who continued to create during these tumultuous times and contributed to another issue of this magazine, thank you. Your voices will never be silenced here at Spectrum.

Bises,

Mia

**nothing left to lose** // Zach Simon

I dream of writing in yellow hues
like the rising sun as it embraces the morning dews

and search for a pallet of it to use
but I always end up in shades of blues
deep dusk cues

memories of the love we lose
writing of different me's
who loved different yous



**Beach Jenny** // Margot Fahrenwald

**Notes on Creating and Cultivating a Forest** // Ciarán Kiely

1. A forest cannot survive if you are unaware of potential internal threats.
   Pry off each and every branch that creaks and caws in the wind
   and find out just how deeply the rot has set in.

2. Invasives will never be a part of a stable ecosystem.
   If possible, ask for a hand and a hunting knife (blade-first)
   and prune away any persistent invaders that are blooming around you.

3. You are building a home for the unknown.
   Illuminate every inch of underbrush by encouraging crown shyness in early bloomers
   and teach new growth to climb towards the light.

4. Some saplings can't stand alone.
   You may need to pull out a rib that has done you no good
   and stake it into the ground alongside slow-growing roots.

5. Tie love letters to the top of every sprout.
   Let acknowledgments fall from them alongside burning leaves
   and build a plush canopy bed of gratitude that will cradle you at night.

6. Find a reflection of your image intertwined in this divine body.
   Notice the vines tied like satin ribbons and flower woven into birds's nests
   and bask in the warmth of the world you have created.

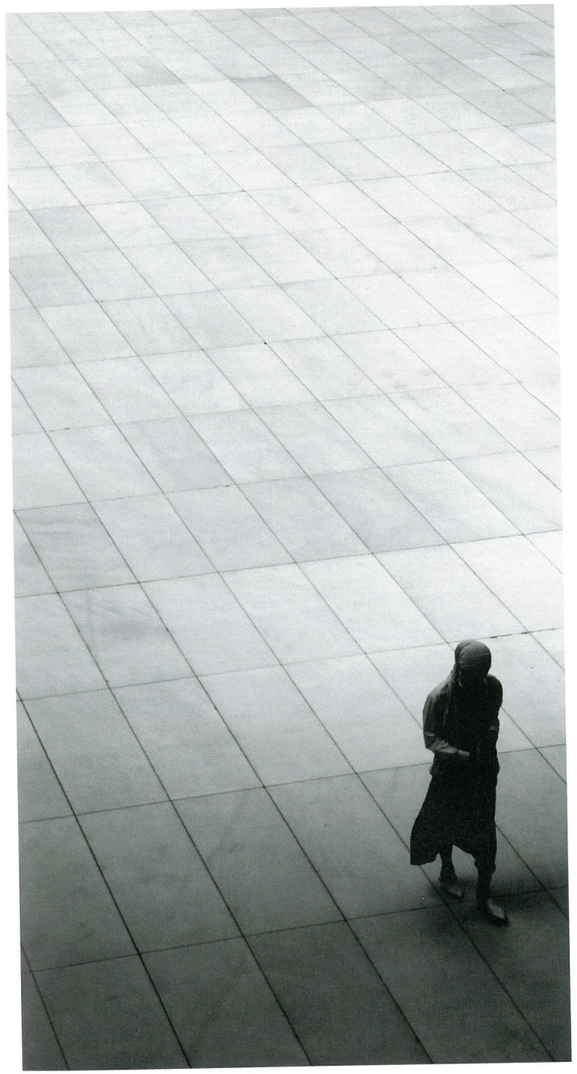
7. Hope is a migratory creature, but it will always return home.
   Transform the feathers it leaves in its hasty escape into a spiral staircase
   and use it to observe the dawn from a new vantage point.

**Following the Footsteps** // Charles Madden

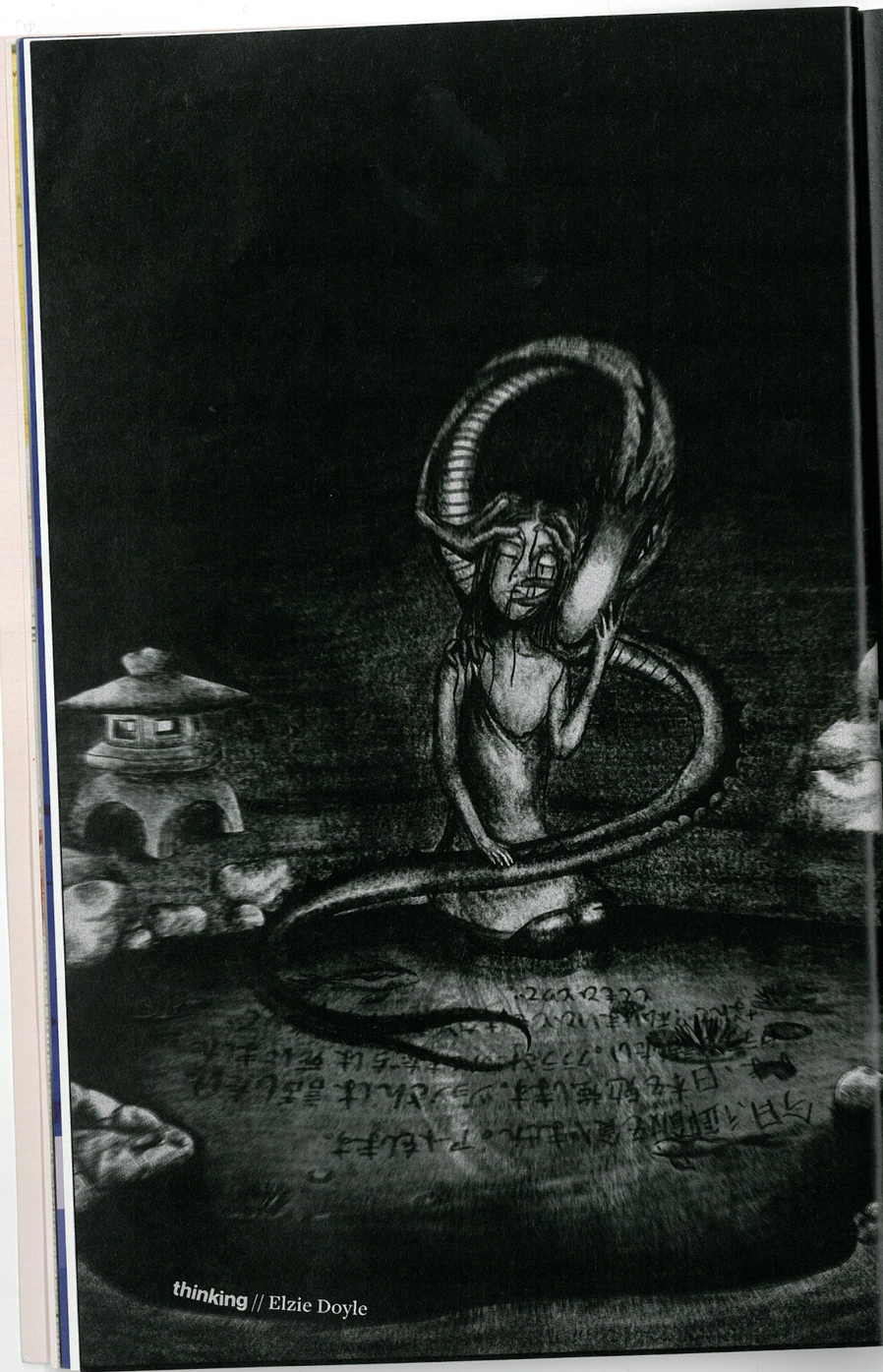
**Self Portrait 2** //
Margot Fahrenwald

**oblivious/tired** // Mirza Nayeem Ahmed





**Mitigate the Distractions** // Charles Madden



**thinking** // Elzie Doyle

**backwards chess** //
Sabrina Ruiz

i wish that the crescent moon could swoop down and
allow me to curl up inside of it
when the tears begin to trickle at night
they slide from my face's warmth into
cold uncertainty

i relish the dark because
it means i can't see my back in the mirror
where claws have raked through
the angry slashes are still fresh so

i do not realize how deep they are
until the next day
when the searing pain jabs at a hazy mind and
warped thoughts pick up where they left off

they are momentarily stumped by
the affection of my partner
or close companions
but they know

they know they will always have a
blood stained card reserving their spot at the table
and one day
the scars will become so large that
the rest of my body deteriorates

eyes that stayed bright even through the pressing times
will droop from their sockets
fingers that clung onto joy
will crumble into ashes

voices can croak i am happier now
so much happier
all they want
until one slip up reminds me
i'm not.

## Nothing Immediate // Elke Thoms

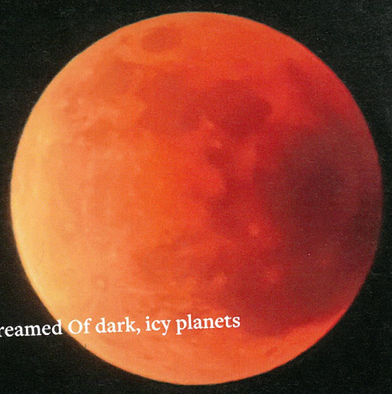
You have time for
The mouth-running matriarchs,
The zoom calls just a few days too long,
The ex that isn't an ex,
But was for a while,
And is now mad but wants to be friends.
These problems allow you to ask
If they can be sanded down, reinvented
Made like new
And you can say
You did that.

I am worried that
There isn't much of me to repair
But there is a lot of me
That would like more
Soft smiles and citrus squeezing
in weekday grocery stores,
Talks over lattes about very little,
Nothing immediate
I worry you don't
Have time for that.

## pyramid scheme // Mirza Nayeem Ahmed

in the ninth grade, i sat myself in front of the stickered mirror. plucked the green crayola marker from the box and drew a flower on my body. slipped into the sharpest scissors i could find and carved until only the stems were left. gathered the petals on a plate and asked my grandmother to please prepare dinner. i watched as they were served with warm bowls of sweet rice and homemade kimchi. i know what it means to provide.

**I was fourteen** // Haeun Park



**A Map of Home** // Mia Merchant

I've never felt lonely when reading the stars.

They were a map of home,
A path that could show us visions of the future
Or drag us far back to the past.
I used to dream about those stars,
Long before I knew what secrets they held
Like Wendy dreaming of a Peter Pan to whisk her away to a far-off fantasy land, I dreamed Of dark, icy planets
and brilliant supernovas that stretched across the whole sky,
Diving into black holes and discovering multiverses of stardust and microbes,
Multiverses that contained ancient worlds and the secrets of those who came before us

But you—
You, who had both feet on the ground,
You, whose dreams were so concrete, so practical,
You, who told me that the stars made you feel small,
That they reminded you of your own mortality, a finite loneliness in the cosmos—
You said to me, once, that what's most important to me
Will always be important to you—
You were the first to believe that my dreams were worth knowing.

The first time I took you stargazing
I was terrified of what you would think of me
Would you, who lived solely on this dull rock we called home, think it trivial, fruitless, wasteful
To spend so many of my waking hours
Dreaming of the stars?
But still,I grabbed your hand, dragged you outside, pointed up
And traced the lines of your first constellation, heart pounding, fingers shaking,
Said to you; "There's a dragon in the sky!"
And I watched the wonder fill your eyes as mine had—
And still do—
Every time I looked up to read the stories written in the stars,
Like pieces of a puzzle coming together
Or a tale that only reveals its true meaning at the very end, just when you're about to give up

My dreams since turned to those nights we spent together
Watching the stars set for the first time, winking out one by one, the birds no longer singing and
The gnats no longer buzzing, the whoosh of cars passing through the neighborhood having
Faded to a whisper, the horizon still a dusky orange and the sky still an inky black
The words we spoke between of us were from a sacred language, written for but a few of us,
Shared by our ancestors and lost in the flow of modern time,
And even though we may be thousands of miles apart,
Just know that we look upon the same stars each night,
A treasure map in the sky that will always lead you to me and me to you,
For no matter where our dreams take us,
Home
Will always be written in the stars

**In Movement** // Margot Fahrenwald



Myth and making,
the small house — the draining
of a clay jar  My father in a chair
fashioning something, before the looks swept in
from every grain of dust.
We waited for hurried steps,
We felt the spirits pass,
  and I thought you untouchable, unfurled

as wind
without the calm speechlessness
Of sky.  Helpless
as the fields and fatbacked pavements
boiling in the daylight.  Raging and weeping
invisible — shroudlike as our mastery
Of the shaking trees
Or the sun.

I called you ghost, screamed it, tore
the shape of dancing circles, streets and squares
For you,  my father? My crumpled pages,
The men in rows
torturing the howl, filling the holes
that fall underfoot —  the stars
pounding against the walls.

What did it matter?  Bent over the mountains
Bleeding through the pentip.  My father
Lost in the fields of his childhood,
Holding me tightly, convinced
Of our inadequacy. God bless
the dark eyes, furrowing, the mask
of stretching hands, the half
and the pinprick. The lost people
apologizing —

the mud
and the sunset spilling
across the ground,
across the multicolor
pulled tight
before worried faces, voices
    cast flat
across those who might still be singing
songs
without names, of words
too lost to memorize.

**show yourself** // Mirza Nayeem Ahmed

**Top 5 Worst Things about Being an Immigrant in America** //
Javier Rosario

**5 You're the only one who doesn't like peanut butter**

It's weird and gunky regardless of whether you get the smooth kind or the other one. The fact that there are two kinds at all, and that everyone you know breaks into camps over it, is possibly the strangest part. You don't understand how there could be such a stark, tribal division over what is effectively just edible glue whose primary purpose is to stick one slice of bread to another. Some people use it as a dip. Others eat it straight out of the jar like room temperature ice cream. To you, there is no correct way to eat peanut butter because every way is equally disgusting. Yet everyone keeps telling you it's the best thing ever. You suffer the confused and at times genuinely insulted pause you get whenever the truth of your distaste comes up halfway through every sandwich conversation.

But despite how often this happens, you never consider lying about it, even through omission. You seem to understand that to lie about this would be a kind of spiritual suicide, though you can't quite explain why. And anyway by now your entire life has shaped itself around your avoidance of peanut butter. The thought has ceased to need your direct attention, rooting itself deeply into your subconscious, informing your every minute decision.

Years of Spanish-dubbed television characters eating this second-rate dessert have aligned it in your mind with the star-spangled flag that met you at the corner of every classroom at school. It's why you stopped reaching for your heart whenever the pledge of allegiance played over the speakers. Every time those words ring out, you remember the feel of that ill-textured paste and are just as unsettled to see that you are the only one with your hand down.

### 4 It's hard hearing news from home

You are eight years old and don't know how to manage what suddenly becomes a long-distance relationship with everyone you know. As the years pass you visit the island during summers and sometimes for Christmas, but Facebook isn't really a thing yet and it feels embarrassing to have to ask your parents to dial the numbers you don't know on the family landline. From one year to the next your best friend grows way taller than you and gets into girls and learns how to drive and starts drinking underage. You do all these things too, but each time you go back you still expect to see him in miniature. Who he is and who he was are layered atop each other like two different camera filters, one in chronological flux and the other fixed relentlessly against the passage of time.

The same thing happens with everyone else. All three of your aunts get divorced, two remarry, and the third joins what everyone assumes to be a cult in Argentina. Four cousins are born and two reach their teens. Your grandparents retire out to the country and then retire back into the city once they realize how boring the country is. One of your old classmates gets engaged and moves to Spain while another becomes a serial entrepreneur with a clothing line and plans to buy a food truck.



You aren't there for any of this, but you hear about it from your parents and sometimes your sister, who is better at keeping in touch. You wonder silently if anyone over there is shocked by anything you've gotten up to these last couple of decades. It seems a bit presumptuous to assume they've thought about it at all.

### 3 You can't recommend your favorite shows

There's one called 31 Minutos. It's like if The Muppets and CNN had a baby, and is to this day the best thing you've ever seen on television. You watched it when you were a toddler and still think it's hilarious now in your twenties.

Every episode closes out with an original music video. One of them features a puppet child and his loose tooth singing about how they'll miss each other once the latter falls out. The premise of the song is so elaborately absurd yet heartfelt that the comedy shadows what can only be genuine sorrow. This is the only song to have ever made you cry, the melody somehow making you feel a kind of wistful nostalgia even back when you first heard it at literally eight years old.

You know that your friends would love this song if they knew Spanish, but none of them know Spanish. Bar a few exceptions, the most they can do is count to ten. Some of them know how to say a few of the colors. You've tried just explaining it to them in English, but it's not the same. You realize that you can keep making all the friends you want, but chances are you'll never be able to share everything you want with them, and it's not even your fault.

### 2 You're never up to date with the fads

During a visit to the island one summer, you score an internship with a local film studio. You join right before they go shoot a commercial for some popular energy drink you've never heard of set in a club you've never been to. Some fifty actors, collectively termed "the talent," successfully simulate a hip and youthful party backdrop for the lead star: a colorful aluminum can sitting atop a bucket full of ice that you learn is actually made of plastic so that it doesn't melt during the twelve hours you'll all be there.

Since you have no prior experience in the industry, you are relegated to the role of "sound guy." As the sound guy, you're sent to the second-floor office and get to sit comfortably behind a computer, overlooking the dance floor below through a wall of glass. The office lights are dim and just barely hide the weathered state of the leather couch and low table that furnish it. You imagine this is where the VIPs go to snort cocaine with the owner. Sitting there alone, your job is to play music during takes so that the talent has something to dance to. To do this, you simply press the spacebar at the command of the director, with whom you communicate across the set over a walkie-talkie. He yells action, you press the spacebar, the music blares, he yells cut, you press the spacebar again, the music stops. This goes on for some time, and eventually the talent starts complaining. They say dancing to the same song for hours gets tiresome, so the director tells you to change it. You ask what you should play, and he tells you to play "Despacito."

Luis Fonsi's "Despacito" is, unbeknownst to you, the most popular song on the planet. There isn't a single radio station that doesn't play it at least once an hour. But you don't listen to reggaeton, even when it makes waves across the globe. You grew up on grunge and hip-hop and maybe a bit of folk. So when the walkie-talkie tells you to play "Despacito," you take it as a somewhat strange request to slow the music down and play the same song you were already playing at half

speed. The walkie-talkie sharply orders you to stop the music and play "Despacito," which to you seems like a contradictory statement, as it feels like you're already doing that. Confused, you play the same song again but even slower, the lyrics now robotic and barely comprehensible, the beat shaking the window wall in long stretches.

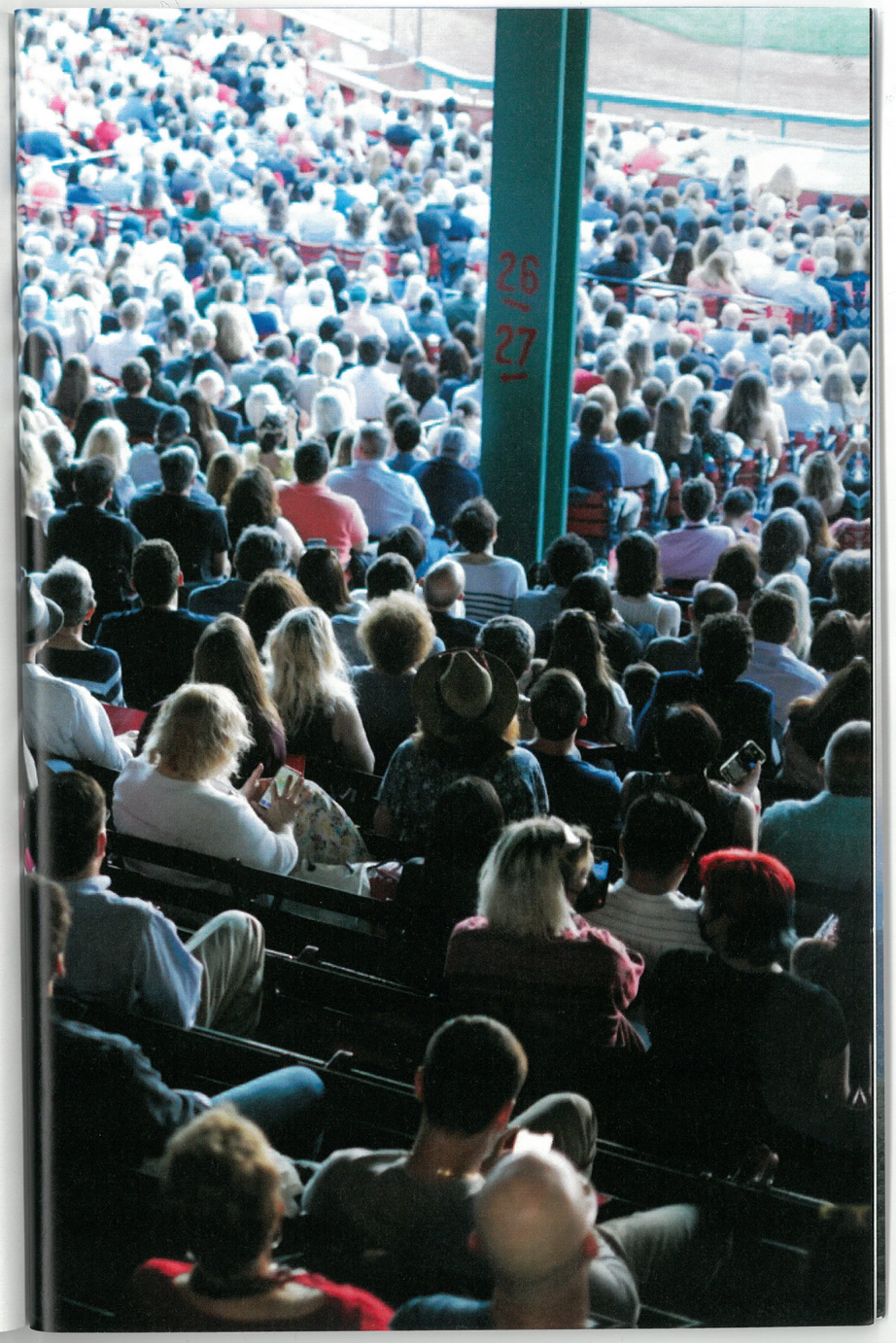
It takes a fellow intern coming up to the office and shoving you out of the way for you to realize your mistake. She types "Despacito" on the search bar, and as Luis Fonsi's voice blasts through the speakers below, she asks you how you haven't heard this song before. The look she gives you is equal parts irritation and astonishment. She asks you this in English despite knowing that Spanish is your first language, as if you couldn't understand otherwise. You spend the rest of the shoot sitting quietly next to her as she does your job for you, intermittently pressing the spacebar.

## 1 No one applauds a successful landing

You get the vague sense that something went wrong during the landing of a domestic flight from Miami to Tampa. Walking to the baggage claim, you think back to every other time you've flown and eventually understand you were bothered by the lack of applause at the end. Every flight to and from the island ends in applause for the pilot and the air hostesses and each other and God and the sturdy bolts on the plane and whatever else might've contributed to everyone's continued survival after soaring thousands of feet in the air at hundreds of miles per hour. You always join in, if only to be polite, though always with a brief roll of the eyes. Now that you didn't get the chance to do it in a plane full of gringos, your sharpest and most cynical thoughts about Americans spring up from the bowels of your repressed resentment. You wait for your luggage and discount the people around you as ungrateful pigs so numbed to their own privilege that even the modern miracle of traveling across whole countries in a matter of mere hours isn't enough to earn their appreciation.

Months later, flying from Tampa back to Miami, you enact your revenge. The plane lands, touching down with a bounce and a booming rush of wind, and you start clapping. But the metal rattling of the plane is too loud, and your clapping is too soft, and you suddenly realize you started too soon. No one can hear you, and no one will follow. Embarrassed, you stop, hands coming to rest on your lap. The man beside you glances over, and you pretend you don't notice. You hope he didn't see you clap.





**The Love Affair** // Hussain Hiba

I sat on the edge of my bed holding my
Friday Folder in the fifth grade. The one
with a blue cartoon dragon on it–
to show Amma what was inside.
I found a plain envelope with the lip
sealed shut.
Amma pried it open and read the white
slip of paper— With her watery eyes
bouncing across the page,
I remember trying to follow along–
Until mine became watery too.

—

Because the monsters won't stop //
caressing its body
and tracing carefully down its spine
until the fingers are no longer delicate in
their touch.
Choking its neck
they pause to catch their breath,
and pull back
yearning for such a satisfying release
it kills.

—

The twisted love affair plagues the land of the free
the home of cowards.
The ones who clutch
so desperately
onto lines written over three hundred years ago
more fiercely than their own children.
They float freely in a state of ignorance
indifferently on their thrones
In the powerful rooms
While Martin Luther King Jr. and Lincoln
Lower their heads some yards away.
The sons and daughters
The mothers and fathers
are the ones who writhe in pain.
Because it was just a Tuesday at school.
And it was just a weekly grocery run
that left a void in their lives forever.
They scream for justice
tracheas burning like they are drowning in sand //
They march in the streets
but radio waves go silent
After a few short weeks
and now its 10 years later– its 2022
and its my brother sitting on the bed with Amma
with a smiling cartoon dragon folder
enclosing a pristine white envelope once again
filled with tragedy.
The twisted love affair continues—
Its been a few weeks now//
and i'm holding my breath for a pen to hit paper
a simple signature to change it all–
but how long will we wait?

**monotheistic asshole** // Abraham Berman

God could be an asshole, drinking all the time
Laughing in the clouds drinking *Chateau de le Ciel* wine
God says to humans, "eat a dick" while bullying the angels
And shapes the upper stratosphere into phallic angles.

God could be an anxious wreck, doubting every choice
He moans about omnipotence and nervously destroys
Every time He sees mistakes, the black holes eat the world
Rearranging, self-apprehending, and mentally unfurled.

God could be a sadist, who locks Her Sims in closets
The war, the genocide, the murder; the holy, fighting prophets She
builds whole planets full of life then grinds them to the bone
Then gathers up the screaming dust and snorts it up Her God-ly nose.

Or God could be a narcissist who waits around for praise
An encyclopedia of omens (centennially rephrased)
God made a world of animals that shower God with love A twilight
zone, a tv show, so God could rise above.

Maybe God's a baby and still learning how to rule
This fucked up drawing of existence smudgy from His drool
He's learning how to crawl by pelting rocks at one another
Completely unaware that life is being torn asunder.

Or God could be a mother, who just wants all the best
For Her kids who bicker endlessly, throwing tantrums without rest
Maybe She hired a nanny and went away for the weekend
If God is single, who knows, maybe God could use a friend.

**Rolling Blue** // Eliana Gilman

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